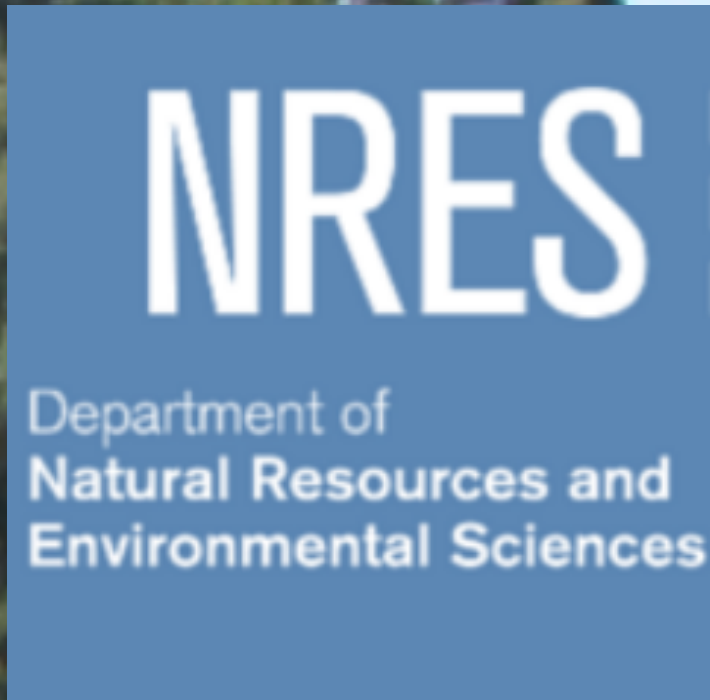




Family forest landowner management in southern Illinois: a qualitative study of goals, trends, and opportunities

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Research Overview:

- Private landowners own 75% of Illinois forest land.
- These forested lands offer **habitat** for native flora and fauna, protect vulnerable waterways, help mitigate climate change through **carbon sequestration**, and provide **aesthetic** and **recreational** enjoyment.



A view of the Shawnee National Forest of southern Illinois.

- A **well-managed forest** based on a **written management plan** is essential to maintaining these services but can be hard to establish on private land. **Less than 30% of landowners in southern Illinois are estimated to have a written forest management plan** for their property.
- Common methods of forest management include **timber stand improvement, prescribed burning, tree thinning/harvesting, invasive species removal and management, and native species planting**.
- Here, we **identify key programs and policies available in southern Illinois that support landowners** who wish to actively manage their forestland and examine the extent to which they are used and the local perceptions of benefits they generate for the environment, local economy, and landowners themselves.



The difference between managed (left) and unmanaged (right) forest land.

Methods:

- Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with seven government, NGO, and academic experts on forest management who live and work in southern Illinois.
- Ten semi-structured interviews have been conducted with private landowners with forestland managed under an IDNR - approved forest management plan.
- Interviews ranged from 17 to 47 minutes with questions separated into six sections: background information, knowledge, practices, forest policy context, program administration, and perceptions of the future.



Key Findings:

- Utility of legislation and programs** – Existing policies and programs provide financial relief to landowners in the form of cost share and tax incentives.
- Education/implementation opportunities** – Education and outreach provide key opportunities to engage landowners who may not be aware of the benefits of forest management/encourage implementation of management practices.
- Cooperation opportunities** – Coordinated efforts on behalf of all the major forest management organizations in the area allows for efficient use of financial resources and a clearer plan of action.
- Goals for management** – A variety of factors motivate landowners to manage and care for their land, e.g. hunting, invasive species management, preserving land for future generations.
- Financial barriers/trends** – Although perceptions of managed forestry are improving, it is often still viewed as expensive, labor-intensive, and time consuming.

Policy	Practice	Agency Support
The Food Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill)	Provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of air, soil, water, plant, and animal life on private working lands.	Natural Resources Conservation Service, University of Illinois Extension
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Provides financial and technical assistance to landowners who plan and implement approved conservation practices in their forest.	Natural Resources Conservation Service, University of Illinois Extension, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
Illinois Forest Development Act of 2006 (IFDA)	Provides technical assistance, free seedlings, a cost-share program, and a tax incentive that values forest land at 1/6th of assessed value to landowners with approved forest management plans.	Illinois Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service, University of Illinois Extension, SIPBA, Makanda CWPP, RRCWMA

Conclusions:

- Environmental impacts:** Recovery of native oak-hickory forests, reducing the spread of invasive species, tree-mediated carbon sequestration, purer air and water, providing a habitat for the flora and fauna of the region.
- Economic impacts:** Tax breaks, cost-share opportunities, the sale of timber and other tree products, income-generating public recreational activities on private land.
- Landowner impacts:** Financial resources, physical assistance, provisioning of valuable timber and woodland products .

